

# ROLL CALL



The Congressional Bike Caucus, which held a ride March 8 during the National Bike Summit, has grown to 111 Members (Photo by Tom Williams)

## On the Hill, Bike-Partisanship

### *House Congressional Bike Caucus Grows; Senators Plan Own Bike Caucus*

Monday, March 25, 2002, Vol. 47, NO. 67

"Everybody has a bicycle story," says Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.). And as the founder of the Congressional Bike Caucus, Blumenauer has heard almost all of them.

"Jim Oberstar is a cycling fanatic!" he said of the Minnesota Democrat, the 2001 National Bicycle Leadership award winner.

Without a calculator or notepad, Oberstar knows his bicycling mileage for both this year and last: "It's 361 miles this year ... and 2,630 last year."

Bike caucus member Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-Mich.) pedaled to victory in his first Congressional campaign in 1992. "He rode his bike from one end of his district to the other," said Jamal Ware, Hoekstra's press secretary.

With all these bicycle stories cycling through Congress, the bike craze is gaining speed on the Hill. The Congressional Bike Caucus, founded in 1996, has 111 Members, 10 of whom joined in March. Also this month, Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) got the wheels turning for a Senate bicycle caucus.

Oberstar, the ranking member on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, has noticed the recent surge in bicycle interest in both houses. "It's really caught on," he said. "People are excited about it."

The bike fervor gained momentum in Congress when the National Bike Summit, sponsored by the League of American Bicyclists, met in Washington three weeks ago.

According to Mele Williams, director of government relations for the Bike League, Durbin had been interested in starting a Senatorial Bike Caucus for more than a year, but he was looking for a Republican co-chair. When Hutchison was visited by the Texas Bicycle Coalition during the summit, she was persuaded to take that position.

"We had several Senators expressing interest when the bicyclers were on the Hill," Williams said. She expects at least a dozen Senators to join the caucus when it is introduced in the Senate following the spring recess.

Bicycling has widespread appeal on the Hill, with the caucus comprising 81 Democrats, 28 Republicans and two Independents.

Blumenauer said the group is safe for all Members because there's no anti-bike lobby group. "We're bike partisan." All we care about is biking and working together."

When the Oregon lawmaker entered the House in 1996, he was searching for a way to bring together all the Members interested in bicycling and its advocacy issues. Blumenauer discussed his ideas with Oberstar, a longtime bicycle advocate. [more]

"[Blumenauer] was discussing ways we could get more House Members involved in bike advocacy, and he said that I should form a caucus," Oberstar said. "But I said no, it's your idea. If I lead it, it will be the same old, same old."

In the early days the group would meet almost monthly for bike rides around the Tidal Basin, but now the rides are less frequent. On March 8, a Congressional Bike Caucus Ride was held, but no Members participated because it was held on a Friday, a day most Members travel back to their districts.

Although the caucus rides have dwindled, the advocacy aspect of the group is still strong. On Capitol Hill, the caucus' lobbying has resulted in more bicycle racks and showers in the Congressional office buildings for Members and staffers who ride their bikes to work. Blumenauer peddles to his office every day, as does Oberstar's Chief of Staff Bill Richard. Oberstar lives 17 miles from the Capitol, in Potomac, Md., so he said he could only ride to work if he could guarantee light at 10 or 11 p.m.

The caucus is working toward encouraging more Members and aides to bike to work through a transportation fringe benefit. Currently, Hill employees can receive tax benefits or cash compensation for carpooling or taking the Metro to work. With Blumenauer's Bike Commuter Act, he hopes to add bicycling to the transportation benefits list.

Federal funding for bicycle facilities and projects has increased since the bike caucus was established. In 1991 the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act provided \$734 million for bicycling programs over six years. In 1998 the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century provided \$965 million for bicycling related projects over six years.

By Lynn Olanoff